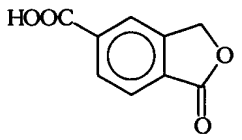
Amendments to the Claims:

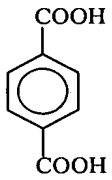
1-21 (Canceled)

22. (Previously presented) A process for the preparation of 5-carboxyphthalide of formula A



(A)

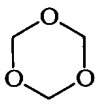
which comprises reacting formaldehyde and terephthalic acid of formula I



(I)

in fuming sulfuric acid containing at least 25-30% by weight of SO_3, heating the mixture at 120-145°C and isolating the 5-carboxyphthalide thus obtained.

23. (Original) A process according to claim 22, in which formaldehyde is used in form of its precursor 1,3,5-trioxane of formula II



(II)

24. (Original) A process according to claim 22, in which formaldehyde is used in form of its precursor paraformaldehyde.

25. (Original) A process according to claim 23, in which the 1,3,5-trioxane of formula II is used in an amount corresponding to 2.5-3.2 mol of formaldehyde/mol of the starting terephthalic acid.

26. (Original) A process according to claim 25, in which said 1,3,5-trioxane is added at a temperature of 30-35°C.

27. (Cancelled)

28. (Previously presented) A process according to claim 22, in which the fuming sulfuric acid is used in an amount of 3-6 litres/Kg of terephthalic acid.

29. (Original) A process according to claim 28, in which fuming sulfuric acid is used in an amount of about 3 litres/Kg of terephthalic acid.

30. (Original) A process according to claim 22, in which 5-carboxyphthalide is isolated by neutralization of the reaction mixture with a base.

31. (Original) A process according to claim 22, in which 5-carboxyphthalide is isolated by diluting the reaction mixture with glacial acetic acid, then adding water and neutralizing with a base.

32. (Original) A process according to claim 30 or 31, in which said base is an alkaline metal base.

33. (Original) A process according to claim 32, in which said alkaline metal base is sodium hydroxide, carbonate or bicarbonate.

34. (Original) A process according to claim 22, in which, at the end of the reaction, the 5-carboxyphthalide is isolated by the formation of a solution containing a salt thereof which is neutralized with an acid.

35. (Original) A process according to claim 34, in which said salt is the sodium salt.

36. (Original) A process according to claim 34, in which the salt is formed by adding the base to a pH of about 8.

37. (Original) A process according to claim 34, in which said acid is hydrochloric acid.

38. (Original) A process according to claim 22, in which 5-carboxyphthalide is isolated by treatment of the reaction mixture with water.

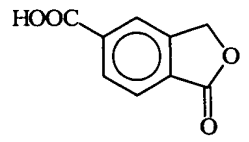
39. (Original) A process according to claim 38, in which the addition of water is made at 0-5°C and the exothermia is controlled by keeping the temperature at about 20-25°C.

40. (Original) A process according to claim 22, in which the mixture is heated at 130-135°C.

41. (Original) A process according to claim 22, in which formaldehyde is added to fuming sulfuric acid after the addition of terephthalic acid.

42. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising ~~the~~ a process for ~~the~~ synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide ~~according to claim 22~~

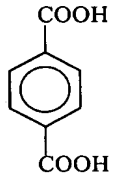
of formula A



(A)

which comprises:

reacting formaldehyde and terephthalic acid of formula I



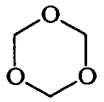
(I)

in fuming sulfuric acid containing at least 25-30% by weight of SO_3;

heating the mixture at 120-145°C; and

isolating the 5-carboxyphthalide thus obtained.

43. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~23~~ 42, in which formaldehyde is used in form of its precursor 1,3,5-trioxane of formula II



(II).

44. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~24~~ 42, in which formaldehyde is used in form of its precursor paraformaldehyde.

45. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~25~~ 43, in which the 1,3,5-trioxane of formula II is used in an amount corresponding to 2.5-3.2 mol of formaldehyde/mol of the starting terephthalic acid.

46. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~26~~ 45, in which said 1,3,5-trioxane is added at a temperature of 30-35°C.

47. (Canceled)

48. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~28~~ 42, in which the fuming sulfuric acid is used in an amount of 3-6 litres/Kg of terephthalic acid.

49. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~29~~ 48, in which fuming sulfuric acid is used in an amount of about 3 litres/Kg of terephthalic acid.

50. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~30~~ 42, in which 5-carboxyphthalide is isolated by neutralization of the reaction mixture with a base.

51. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~31~~ 42, in which 5-carboxyphthalide is isolated by diluting the reaction mixture with glacial acetic acid, then adding water and neutralizing with a base.

52. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~32~~ 50 or 51, in which said base is an alkaline metal base.

53. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~33~~ 52, in which said alkaline metal base is sodium hydroxide, carbonate or bicarbonate.

54. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~34~~ 42, in which, at the end of the reaction, the 5-carboxyphthalide is isolated by the formation of a solution containing a salt thereof which is neutralized with an acid.

55. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~35~~ 54, in which said salt is the sodium salt.

56. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~36~~ 54, in which the salt is formed by adding the base to a pH of about 8.

57. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~37~~ 54, in which said acid is hydrochloric acid.

58. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~38~~ 42, in which 5-carboxyphthalide is isolated by treatment of the reaction mixture with water.

59. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~39~~ 58, in which the addition of water is made at 0-5°C and the exothermia is controlled by keeping the temperature at about 20-25°C.

60. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~40~~ 42, in which the mixture is heated at 130-135°C.

61. (Currently amended) A process for the synthesis of citalopram, comprising the process for the synthesis of 5-carboxyphthalide according to claim ~~41~~ 42, in which formaldehyde is added to fuming sulfuric acid after the addition of terephthalic acid.